

Veterans From the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion Attend Reunion and Exhibit Dedication

By Mr. Kip A. Lindberg



The US Army Chemical School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, hosted veterans of the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion at their annual reunion on 12 October 2004. Eight veterans, along with their wives and families, participated in a full day of activities designed to honor the men for their service during World War II and the Korean War.

After a stirring address by Regimental Command Sergeant Major Patrick Alston, the veterans laid a wreath at their battalion monument in the Chemical Corps Memorial Grove. A memorial service followed at the adjacent World War II Chapel, where Brigadier General Stanley H. Lillie, Chief of Chemical and Commandant of the US Army Chemical School, paid tribute to the enduring sacrifices made by the members of the 2d. The veterans and their families were honored that Brigadier General Lillie would take time from his busy schedule to meet with them, especially since the reunion coincided with the Worldwide Chemical Conference.

Following the memorial ceremony, the Chemical Corps Museum unveiled an exhibit dedicated to the 2d

Chemical Mortar Battalion. The exhibit, a blend of uniforms, weapons, equipment, photographs, and a life-size diorama combined to relate the lineage and history of the battalion. One veteran remarked on the exhibit unveiling: "I don't know if they got it finished and held it up for us or had to rush to get it ready, but either way, it was damn nice of them!" Following the exhibit unveiling, the museum staff led the veterans on a tour of the facility. Later, the group watched a 15-minute video presentation created by the Chemical School Historian covering the unit's role in serving our nation.

The Chemical Museum also hosted interview sessions between Waynesville High School history students and the veterans. The students queried the veterans on their



A veteran examines the life-size diorama created by the museum staff to illustrate the history of the battalion.




Waynesville history students interview veterans for inclusion in the Veterans History Project.

wartime experiences, recording the information for posterity and inclusion in the Veterans History Project, a Library of Congress project that collects and preserves the extraordinary wartime stories of ordinary people.

Throughout the day, the veterans and their families were assisted by soldiers, staff, and volunteers from the Chemical School, the Noncommissioned Officer Academy, and the Chemical Corps Regimental Association. These

groups worked together to ensure that the veterans' visit to Fort Leonard Wood was safe, enjoyable, and memorable. That evening, at their annual dinner, the veterans discussed the reunion events. One man, an attendee of every reunion since 1946, announced that this year's reunion was the best ever. All were impressed by the honors paid to them, as a group and as individuals.

A direct descendant of the 1st Gas and Flame Regiment (World War I), the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion was organized in 1935 to serve as the nation's primary

gas warfare unit. During World War II, the battalion fought in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany, making two amphibious landings and one glider assault. The 2d was the only chemical mortar battalion to fight in Korea; and when the battalion was redesignated as infantry in 1953, it marked the end of the Chemical Corps' association with the 4.2-inch chemical mortar. 

Mr. Lindberg is the curator of collections at the US Army Chemical Corps Museum.

Tribute to the Men of the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion



The following is an excerpt from a retreat ceremony honoring the memory of the men of the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion. William R. Thomas delivered this speech on 15 September 2000 at Edgewood Arsenal (EA-APG), Maryland.

This historic Army post, once known as Army Chemical Center and as Edgewood Arsenal, was the last home of the Chemical Corps' oldest and most distinguished combat unit—the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion.

We have assembled here today to observe a significant event in the history of our battalion and a memorable milestone for those of us who soldiered here fifty years ago. Exactly fifty years ago today, on September 15th in the year 1950, we boarded the troop train that would take us across the country to the ship that would take us to Korea. We left Edgewood to do what soldiers are supposed to do: fight wars to destroy the enemy and, in so doing, risk being destroyed.

Our departure marked the end of a year and a half of training, which began here with the reactivation of the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion early in 1949. Because of our distinctive crest and patch, and perhaps because of our behavior, some called us the “Red Dragons.” Our battalion commander was an old soldier who had fought in World War I and World War II. Many of our officers and NCOs had returned from the battlefields of World War II, which had ended only four years earlier. Like the Americans described in Tom Brokaw's best-selling book, they were indeed “the greatest generation.” The rest of us had joined the Army recently, but shared a common belief that the purpose of the Army was to fight and win wars, not to

serve as a social laboratory for special interests or militant feminists. Most of our men had volunteered. Their serial numbers began with the letters RA—Regular Army. We were a Regular Army unit. We were a combat unit and proud of it!

Here at Edgewood, we trained hard and played hard. There were constant training cycles. We learned to fire mortars. We learned to use our individual weapons. We learned to live in the field. Inspections and parades were a way of life. We joined the rest of the Army in large maneuvers. We trained Reserve and National Guard units. However, none of us really believed we would be in a real war.

By today's standards, life in the Army of 1950 was tough. In fact, it was designed solely to build disciplined soldiers to fill the ranks of an Army that would prevail on the battlefield. At times, the NCOs were abrasive. At times, the officers were arrogant. We belonged to an austere Army managed largely by combat veterans who discouraged interference by social engineers. The few dollars disbursed to privates at the pay table were often gone before the end of the month. The barracks, like those of World War II, would seem primitive to the soldiers in today's Army. A soldier leaving the post on weekends needed a Class A pass, which officers and NCOs often denied as a disciplinary tool.